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Ecological narrative and material consciousness in Anita Rau Badami's *The Hero's Walk*

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Abstract

The Hero's Walk offers a parallel narrative of environmental concerns and transnational movements. The hero's walk is physical and metaphorical, signifying a transnational movement and environmental degradation taking shape simultaneously. The novel, through its multilayered plot, critiques human greed and colonial attitudes towards the environment, juxtaposing humans' exploitation of nature with the immigrant family's narrative of shattered values of Indian society. Building on this, the article explores how the writer narrates the environment's parallel beauty, only to contrast it with harsh and painful human activities. It, therefore, contrasts human materiality with environmental materiality, such as the sea, rain, and the earth. The current paper ventures into the materiality of the body and ecocritical concerns against the backdrop of immigration and diasporic experiences. The argument moves towards the critical understanding of how ecocriticism can be woven into the postcolonial debate of the globalised world. The paper extends the focus of ecocriticism to investigate how the physical environment, including animals, intra-acts/interacts with the changing corporeal bodies of humans against the backdrop of climate change. That is to say, bodily materiality is juxtaposed against socio-cultural beliefs, immigration, and physical environment, and the paper reveals the transient nature of bodies that change proportionately to climate change.

Keywords: immigration; materiality; nonhumans; climate change; global concerns

Introduction

Rau Badami's *The Hero's Walk* (2000) presents a parallel narrative of family stories and environmental concerns. The novel presents transnational movements, generational questions of immigration, and ecological concerns that shape the humans in the background. The novel's primary focus appears to be matters of family crisis, but as the narrative proceeds, the latent descriptions of environmental concerns and transnational movements resurface to take the central stage of the narrative. It indicates a shift in the narrative from individual subaltern experiences to global aftershocks of transnational movements and global concerns of environmental crises. The novel's portrayal of transnational movements, involving cross-border activities of immigrant communities, curiously coincides with environmentalism to create a parallel narrative in the novel. This is in line with what critics suggest about the identity construction through the "glorified rubrics of transnationalism and pluralism" (Rotzokou 56), while directly correlating the diasporic identity with environmental consciousness. Transnational movements, as they relate to the inner processual and in-becoming nature of immigrant communities, are inherently transformative, marked by

dynamic cross-border relationships (Tedeschi et al. 604). Recent studies have broadened the scope of transnationalism and have emphasised "transnational efforts to respond to environmental challenges and build global governance capacity" (Falkner 158). Advancing the ecocritical and postcolonial debate of transnational movements, the paper interrogates the connection between environmental degradation and humans' interaction with the changing environment, which proportionately affects the porous bodies. In this quest, material consciousness, constituting humans' interaction/intra-action with the physical world, results in shaping minds and bodies while recognising the inherent vibrancy in objects and things. Materiality, in this case, considers the body as "an assemblage of material exchanges" (Arndal 69), and the material consciousness is a combined space of humans and nonhumans that recognises material energy emanating from all living and non-living nonhumans. It is this material energy which, while dethroning anthropocentric visions of humankind, establishes nonhumans as actants, as Latour calls it, or vibrant matters, as Bennett calls it. Rau Badami, in her novel, allows for the material interaction to unfold and develop an environmental narrative that ranges from environmental activism to the simultaneous inclusion of transnational movements and the issues of ecological balance.

The narrative of *The Hero's Walk* revolves around Sripathi Rao, who disowns his daughter Maya as she marries a Canadian man. Maya's cross-border movement, consisting of studying in Canada and marrying a white man, indicates conflicts between family values and individual freedom. Sripathi's visit to Canada to take Maya's orphaned daughter, Nandana, back to India after the death of both parents in a tragic car accident implies a step towards understanding his daughter. A transnational movement in these cases is both physical and transformative. Born and raised in Canada, Nandana, a seven-year-old child, has to adapt to Indian customs. Towards the end of the novel, the latent descriptions of ecological balance eventually culminate in Arun's environmental activism. In many ways, Rau Badami's environmental consciousness, visible in her novel, aligns with the contemporary trend of environmentalism among several Indian writers. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novels, for example, explore similar trends of involving personal and individual stories fused with issues of global concerns. Her *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) contextualises Indian mythology in relation to humans' connection with nature. Similarly, Amitav Ghosh, known for his environmental treatise *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016), highlights some of the serious concerns of climate change. His recent novel, *Gun Island* (2019), is an interesting example that forecasts the repercussions of climate change. It is noticeable that environmental consciousness and transnational movements are concerns in many of the contemporary novels.

The critical perspectives on diasporic novels have also followed the contemporary trend of environmental criticism. While the shift from colonial narrative to globalisation and transnational narrative has been widely acknowledged by critics, the newest addition to this trend is the posthuman turn in diasporic writing, as it weaves environmental concerns as one of the main concerns of the contemporary world. Oppermann, in his "Storied Seas and Living Metaphors in the Blue Humanities", identifies material ecocriticism while analysing seascapes and their relationship to humans and environmental conservation. Here, the writer attempts to shift the dominant narratives from the landscape to the seascapes while focusing on the material and discursive contexts of ecocritical theory (Oppermann 443). Boast's paper, while attempting to categorise 'the water wars novel' as a genre, also highlights the dearth of sea narrative critical perspectives in the survey research of multiple narratives from different locations (1). Santos Perez also connects blue humanities with Diasporic literature in the close analysis of Diasporic Chamoru Poetry. The writer identifies the influence of sea

voyages in the poetic expressions and connects the role of sea voyages in the identity formation of migrating communities (1). Iovino and Oppermann, in their paper "Theorizing Material Ecocriticism: A Diptych", offer a critical commentary on new materialism and its connection with ecological concerns of our world. Their focus mainly lies in the theoretical developments of various new materialist theorists and the converging routes of these theories (448).

Scholarship on *The Hero's Walk* is limited, and a few critics have offered their commentary on the seminal work of Rau Badami. It is also noticeable that the existing scholarship does not include the material angles of the ecological balance on which human existence rests. For example, Härting, theorising diaspora studies in reference to Canadian studies and placing the diaspora novels in the context of Canadian literature, compares "diasporic cross-currents in Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* and Anita Rau Badami's *The Hero's Walk*" (Härting 43). Härting mainly focuses on questions of identity in light of the theories of diaspora studies. While the critic includes transnational movements, he ignores larger ecological concerns that the contemporary world faces. O'Brien, on the other hand, discusses the interrelationship between the theoretical frameworks of ecocriticism and postcolonialism against the backdrop of globalisation. Although his chief function is to reveal "connections and disjunctions" between postcolonialism and ecocriticism (140), the study does not interrogate the material interrelationship between humans and the physical world. In her paper on *The Hero's Walk*, Sharma underscores the connections between postcolonialism and ecocriticism, acknowledges the diasporic turn towards ecological and transnational focus, and unravels ecological concerns in the novel (277). Although she pinpoints pressing issues of environmental justice in contemporary times, she does not correlate interactions between humans and the physical world, which is a crucial point to understanding growing concerns of ecological balance and to resisting the anthropocentric vision by way of shifting the central focus from humans to the surrounding material world for environmental sustainability. Recognising the border perspective of postcolonialism, which includes both humans and Nature as victims of colonial hegemony (Riaz et al. 204), the paper brings forth material connections between humans and the natural world. It aligns the individual quest with the collective quest, equating the microcosm with the macrocosm in the global material perspectives of environmental criticism. Material acknowledgement emerges from individual pursuits, which automatically align with collectivism, substantiating what the material theorists indicate as displacing the divide between humans and nonhumans in their mutual entanglements, while interrogating speciesism in favour of posthuman collectivism (Polak 114), which shapes in union rather than in individual separateness.

The paper analyses Rau Badami's *The Hero's Walk* to examine environmental concerns while revealing intra-active connections between humans and nonhumans, acknowledging the nonhuman actants as vibrant agency that performs an essential role in environmental sustainability and justice issues. It maintains that recognising the active role of the vibrant agents plays a pivotal role in alleviating the realities of climate change. *The Hero's Walk* progresses this discussion by exploring how geographic space, the physical environment, and other non-human actors are entangled with human histories, economy, and culture. The paper ventures into the materiality of the body and ecocritical concerns against the ghost of immigration and diasporic experiences. It intervenes on how the physical environment, including animals, intra-act/interact with the changing corporeal bodies of humans against the backdrop of climate change. That is to say, bodily materiality is juxtaposed against socio-cultural beliefs, immigration, and physical environment, and the paper reveals the transient nature of bodies that change proportionately to climate change.

The research paper employs new materialism as its theoretical framework to unravel posthuman conditions and environmental crises through the analysis of the novel. Through new materialism, it identifies what Prasad claims is the rupture in ecological balance proportionately related to humans' involvement with the natural environment, and the same results in the disastrous effects of climate change (283). The paper substantiates this claim through the framework of new materialism, which, by virtue of being anti-Anthropocene, repositions humans and reimagines the relationship between humans and nonhumans. It recognises new materialism's claim of nonhuman entities as active and constructive partners in their interaction with humans. This nonhuman vibrancy displaces the Anthropocentric position of humans by rejecting their exceptionalism and placing them as one of the co-constitutive agencies. Nayar defines this human and nonhuman relationship as "mutually dependent and co-evolving" (19). While theorising human and nonhuman relationships, new materialism attaches entanglements as particles of nonhuman entities that shape human subjects. While there are many theoretical models within new materialism, the paper selects three major concepts of new materialism: Barad's intra-action, Bennett's vibrant matter, and Alaimo's transcorporeality. These theoretical concepts, although conceptualised by different theorists, have a keen alignment with one another as they reimagine the dichotomy between humans and nonhumans and identify active agents in nonhuman subjects. In my view, they offer a suitable platform for analysing the role of nonhuman agency, both living and non-living, in shaping human subjects, as they acknowledge the actant role of nonhuman entities. Barad considers intra-action as a key aspect in her book *Meeting the Universe Halfway* and states that it "signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies (*Meeting the Universe* 33). This mutual constitution, as she argues, depends on entangled agencies which eventually form individual entities. In other words, individual entities primarily depend on this mutual constitution, and distinct and independent entities cease to exist because of this mutual constitution. Here, "new materialists go much further in their approach to agency, decoupling the concept from human action and acknowledging diverse non-human forms of agency" (Clark 794). This critical shift from human action to the vibrancy of the nonhuman agency becomes pivotal in the construction of human bodies. Therefore, the notion of independent and distinctive entities does not hold any relevance in contemporary times. Further, through the mutual entanglements, which form the subjects and carry the residues of other entities, intra-action performs its task of modifying the subjects. Subjects exist only in relation to other objects, devoid of absolute independence. Her contention on this point relies on the mutual constitution of the individual entities that co-create one another (Barad, *Meeting the Universe* 33). This point of intra-action, rather than interaction, which assumes the distinctive independent nature of all entities, becomes relevant for posthuman environmental concerns, wherein all the entities are mutually co-constitutive. Their mutual dependence, while acknowledging them as active agents, becomes an essential point for ecological balance.

Bennett identifies vibrancy in the matter, highlighting "the agentic contributions of nonhuman forces" (xvi). Her concern is to acknowledge the active vibrancy of the matter that can exert its power on humans and for what she calls 'thing-power'. She explains that thing-power refers to a unique possibility of recognising the power of the nonhuman or manmade objects which exert their vibrancy by assuming independence during their interaction with humans (xvi). Bennett's thing-power is akin to Barad's intra-action in that they corroborate the active agency of the matter outside the Anthropocene regime. While Barad relies on the co-constitutive nature of human and nonhuman interaction/intra-action, she points to the inherent active agency in the matter that is analogous to Bennett's vibrancy in the matter, which, unlike intra-action's co-constitutive nature, relies on independent matter-energy in its forces that counter human exceptionalism deeply rooted in language and culture (xvi). A

similar line of argument is also noticeable in Alaimo's transcorporeality, which examines this interconnectedness between human bodies and nonhuman entities (2).

Barad's intra-action also relates to Alaimo's transcorporeality, which envisions nonhuman elements not as independent bodies but as having inescapable traces of nonhuman elements that include the larger frame of the environment, constituting tangible and intangible elements and eliminating recognisable boundaries between humans and environment. Alaimo's transcorporeality points to environmental justice issues, as the changed environment has a transcorporeal connection with living entities. While analysing the external environmental hazards, she connects the corresponding effects of the same on human bodies that are invariably extended parts of the environment. Therefore, whether it is Bennett's thing-power, Barad's intra-action, or Alaimo's transcorporeality, they all acknowledge matter-energy as an active force, and environmental concerns cannot be alleviated unless this matter-energy and its intra-active or transcorporeal connection with humans are recognised. Drawing from this theoretical angle, the paper recognises how the matter that surrounds humans plays an active role in shaping humans and addressing environmental concerns. Therefore, Alaimo argues that environmental illness directly affects human bodies and states that "environmental illness offers a particularly potent example of transcorporeal space, in which the human body can never be disentangled from the material world" (24), and both the environment and humans are entangled in a way that their cohesive union is a key to environmental sustainability and human survival.

Eco-Diaspora and Material Consciousness

The Hero's Walk is a trendsetting example of a diasporic novel, which presents both transnational movements and environmental concerns. In other words, Rau Badami, a Canadian writer of Indian origin, does not fail to integrate migratory experiences while weaving them with ecological concerns resulting from humans' petty emotions of greed and self-centeredness. Most chapters of the novel are named after natural phenomena, such as "By the Edge of the Sea", "The Storm", "Shades of Blue", and "The Flood." These names are not accidental but deliberate, and they identify the spirit of the novel. These names have a pattern, indicating how individual and familial motives often contrast with environmental concerns. They indicate how humans take advantage of natural resources without understanding the ecological balance disrupted in the process. I attribute such emerging traits of diasporic writing, which involve the intersection between diasporic experiences, new materialism, and ecocritical concerns, to eco-diaspora. Similar understanding of eco-diaspora, involving ecocriticism and diasporic sensibilities, is also present in the research of Areej Saad Almutairi, Ruzy Suliza Hashim, and Raihanah M. M. (182). While they connect eco-diaspora with hybrid cultures and ecological cultures, this study advocates for the material angle of eco-diaspora, focusing on the nonhuman agencies narrated in the novel. In this section, the paper examines the ecocritical perspectives of eco-diaspora in relation to material consciousness, involving material interaction between humans and nonhuman entities. Eco-diaspora borrows from new materialism's "renewed attention to the more-than-human entanglements of the climatic and ecological crises of the Anthropocene" (Ejsing 244), and in the process, involves diasporic sensibilities that visualise the diasporic roots through the routes of environmentalism. In other words, eco-diaspora revisits nostalgia and dislocations through material consciousness involving environmental concerns. Here, Rau Badami shows how nostalgia, dislocation, and transnational movements interact with material agencies of what Barad says, thingification ("Posthumanist Performativity" 812), involving more-than-human entanglements, and narrativises environmental concerns and activism. The focal point

of this argument involves the intersection between environmentalism and the new materialistic perspectives that become the means to achieve environmentalism. The paper identifies the links between environmental consciousness and new materialism in the diasporic novels. It is noteworthy to understand how diasporic writers address ecological concerns, connecting nostalgia or a sense of belonging with ecological balance. While addressing ecological or environmental problems, they tend to go back to the past when ecological balance was intact and ecological crises were not a phenomenon. Such situations usually take a writer back to the past when environmental degradation was not such a menace. Here, nostalgia for lost roots connects with the better times devoid of environmental concerns, and temporal relocation in the past is a way to achieve this nostalgia for environmental longings of ecological balance. Nostalgia, while relating to the past to find connections with lost roots, finds the right solace, as meeting with roots is also analogous to finding better ecological conditions. Rau Badami, while taking a stroll in the past to reconnect with her roots and narrate the experiences of immigration, finds comforting realities in environmental issues, as they are analogous to her roots. Therefore, the present condition of the writer reflects how the loss of roots intertwines with the receding of ecological balance. Here, the loss of nature refers to the depletion of natural resources and ecological balance, which is a concern inextricably linked to climate change and the destruction of habitats for nonhuman species, making it a natural part of the diasporic narrative.

Nature and diasporic roots have a shared history of a nostalgic past: one is concerned with the lost homeland, and the other is concerned with the loss of ecological balance. It is noticeable that the material memory of the past affects minds and bodies across time and space while constructing "event-assemblages" to enact changes in personalities (Fox and Alldred 25). The material memory becomes a reminder of the loss of nature and diasporic roots, as it leads to the erasure or cutting off from the nostalgic beauty of nature and cultural roots. A few decades ago, the natural world was most widely felt by humans. The chirping of birds, the voices of insects, the presence of birds in houses, and the ample number of giant trees around were familiar. Today, their existence is receding and being replaced by the urban culture of mushrooming buildings and roads. Incidentally, today's diaspora has a similar history when they connect with their distant past in the motherland. Rau Badami writes about this phenomenon of the receding of the natural world and the proliferation of urban culture. At the beginning of the novel, the writer contrasts the temple bell, which is so loud, with nature's voice. Sripathi, one of the major characters, complains about the deafening voice of the temple bell, which used to be moderate in loudness earlier. He argues, "All I am saying is, why do you have to make it so loud? God is not deaf, is he?" The priest replied, "What to do? The mosque has megaphones. Also the Ganesha temple. So tell me, how will our Lord Krishna hear us with all this competition?" (Rau Badami 7). The writer contrasts this banal argument with the sublimity of nature's voice when she narrates squirrels' chittering and the lory bird's fluid trill. The scene recounts the loudness of human machinery, the soothing sounds of nature, and the distant memory of nature's gifts. The writer narrates how nature is silenced by human loudness: "The bell finally ceased its tintinnabulation. A fragile peace descended. All that Sripathi could hear now was the chittering of squirrels…" (Rau Badami 7). That is to say, the uprooting of the diaspora community is analogous to the uprooting of humans from their roots in nature, and this development materialises against the backdrop of the material space of mutual reconfigurings between humans and nonhumans.

When humans and nonhumans interact, the material space creates blurred boundaries that absolve humans from the centre stage of the planet. The bird's voice, in the novel, creates this

material space wherein the corporeal body, due to its extended entanglement, attains transcorporeality. Rau Badami narrates, "Sripathi stared out at the deserted street and allowed the sweet, high notes of the bird to fill his troubled mind. So must the Emperor of China have felt when he heard the nightingale's melody; he thought, remembering a story from his youth" (Rau Badami 179). Here, the bird's song attains a transcorporeal space inextricably attached to the human body. Humans' separateness from other organic or inorganic nonhuman agencies becomes invalid in the process of naturalisation and cohabitation on Earth (Rodine 156). Sripathi's mind and body are not separate, nor are there any determinate boundaries between him and the bird's voice as they share a linked material space of mutual co-existence. The novelist contrasts the soothing materiality of nature with the deviant matter constructed by humans, as the latter causes worry and anxiety, in contrast to the tranquillity experienced by natural sounds. For example, trash or human waste can play the role of what Bennett says, an actant, which "is a source of action that can be either human or nonhuman; it is that which has efficacy, can do things, has sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events" (Bennett viii). Debris alters the course of events as it is detrimental to environmental health and causes anxiety or other related effects on the human body. As Rau Badami narrates an incident of Sripathi, "Absently he noticed that pile of debris blocking his gate had grown higher; the noise of thunder that morning had been a truck dumping more broken concrete. He tried to summon up the anger that had fuelled his quarrel with one of those truckers months ago, but found that he could not do so. It was as if he was standing outside of his body, dispassionately watching himself bumble through his daily routines" (Rau Badami 181). Debris becomes a deviant actant that holds the potential to cause detrimental changes in human bodies. Questions arise. Does the debris cause Sripathi to quarrel with the trucker? Does the debris make him hateful and angry? Does the debris make him feel helpless? If the answer is yes, the debris is a recalcitrant matter wreaking havoc (temporarily but consistently) in the life of Sripathi. Like an actant, it does not cease to change or affect human bodies. In this context, Bennett explains the vital materialism of trash and its impacts, and calls it 'thing-power' which possesses the potential to exert its presence, to act unexpectedly, and produce 'dramatic and subtle effects' (6). While recounting one of her experiences of debris, Bennett asks, "Was the thing power of the debris I encountered but a function of the subjective and intersubjective connotations, memories, and affects that had accumulated around my ideas of these items? Was the real agent of my temporary immobilization on the street that day humanity, that is, the cultural meanings of "rat," "plastic," and "wood" in conjunction with my own idiosyncratic biography? It could be. But what if the swarming activity inside my head was itself an instance of the vital materiality that also constituted the trash?" (10). As Bennett argues, the same experience of debris is the instance of vital materiality that caused Sripathi to think and change his subjectivities beyond his control.

We can also observe similar recalcitrance in the acoustic experiences of Sripathi, as Rau Badami narrates, inadvertently, matter and nonhumans as dominant forces that constantly shape humans and their existence. Here, matter, as Bennett suggests, attains vibrancy and enables the transcorporeal possibilities of shaping human bodies, unfolding intrinsic liveliness to the materiality usually disposed of as ordinary objects (vxi). Bell becomes an object, believed to be an object, a force of spirituality for the priest, and a deafening sound for Sripathi. This material interaction underlines the experience of the sound of the bell. However, the vibrancy of the matter is usually subjective and cannot offer a common experience to all. Their vibrancy can certainly shape human experience and alter the bodies, but cannot offer a similar experience to all, leading to the transient and fluctuating nonhuman agency. The material turn is exciting and offers a critical understanding of matter, often

conceived as passive objects for human consumption. Iovino and Oppermann argue in favour of the conceptual model to advocate for the connection between matter and energy in relation to the meanings that emerge from the interaction between bodies and nature, proposing that the nonhuman matter-energy is inherently connected with living matter (450). This case of material inclusion in environmental concerns makes it necessary to include Iovino and Oppermann's contexts of material ecocriticism.

Material ecocriticism requires us to recognise material conditions while understanding and identifying the material realities of the physical environment. Agentic qualities of matter become necessary to evaluate changing patterns of the environment, in which humans and matter are active partners that shape the world collaboratively. The physical world, constituted of matter, requires our attention to acknowledge the energy emanating from matter and its vibrations, which continue to shape not only the physical world but also humans. In analysing the text, I use the framework in which "matter acts as a text composed by multiple agencies, at once material, semiotic, and discursive. Understanding these emergent patterns from a material-ecocritical viewpoint is not only a way to contrast binary models of nature and knowledge, but also to redraw the maps of ecological interactions, restructuring ethics and politics in the complex, nonlinear, co-evolutionary interplay of human and nonhuman agency" (Iovino and Oppermann 451). While venturing into discursive practices, the matter-text involves broader questions about how ethics, constructions of knowledge, and socio-political situations evolve in these material practices. Discursive practices must question the domain of knowledge in ethics and socio-cultural practices, as they often endorse the anthropocentric position of humans. In contrast, the matter-text dissolves such boundaries of nature, human-driven knowledge, and human and nonhuman separateness. In line with such material practices, I identify ongoing material reconfigurations, as Barad calls it, between humans and nonhuman objects, redefining boundaries between them, and involving ethical and ecological considerations in the novel.

The writer describes global concerns of environmental sustainability, identified in discursive practices involving nonhuman agencies, as parts of the narratives of both minor and major characters. One of the minor characters, Munnuswamy, when asked about walking barefoot, answers, "The earth is my mother. How can a humble cowherd like me insult her by wearing shoes?" (Rau Badami 74). The simple sentence has both political and spiritual meanings. While it may have political connotations, it indeed proposes a credible idea that is environmentally conducive to the present times. The Earth is not a passive matter waiting to be explored and its resources consumed, but a vital matter that provides energy and shapes humans. This is not just to the earth at large but to all the earthly matters that typify agentic qualities. A similar interaction with a nonhuman entity, this time a living one, appears when Sripathi writes a note to the editor for the general benefit of the people. The note runs:

> Dear Editor, Recently, there was an article in your esteemed newspaper about the new highlight at Dizzee World in Madras. Apparently, trained birds imported from Singapore astonish visitors to the park by answering the telephone, conducting polite conversations, playing basketball, riding bikes, obeying traffic rules and picking up trash. It is my humble opinion that we, the citizens of this country, might be better served if these birds were to replace our politicians, corporate thugs, the mafia who run police stations and other assorted crooks. (155)

The stark environmental consciousness shows animality in humans and humanity in animals. Humans' material reality changes when nonhumans assume humanistic roles and humans

undertake animalistic roles. If nonhumans were to rule the world, the environment would be cleaner and healthier, as it is human activities that have caused severe damage to the planet, disregarding that the world is intra-actively connected, in which the intricate web of connections decides the longevity of human survival and environmental sustainability. Such sustainability, as Alaimo describes, is transcorporeal in nature as the material selves of humans are not separate or distinct from the nonhuman materials, and material selves and nonhuman entities of the agential world recognise each other in the process of sustainability (561). Since Alaimo's transcorporeality is inherently material, disregarding the absolute separateness between humans and nonhumans, cohesiveness with the nonhuman entities while avoiding exploitative human greed is imperative. For example, trash results from human activity, but the same trash has different material realities as the side effects are interwoven with other energy sources. Rau Badami opines that humans, driven by capitalistic greed, cannot control the ongoing destruction of planetary resources, but a role reversal, equalising both humans and nonhumans, can only enact the serious and required changes to human society. Rau Badami, in the passage, maintains an ironic tone while ensuring that the passage's meaning highlights the goodness of the nonhuman entity, and environmental sustainability can be achieved alongside the well-being of the nonhuman entity.

The nonhuman entity, comprising living and non-living objects, contributes to managing planetary movements. Planetary movements are not usually categorised as rapid and catastrophic changes in the environment, as they have their own ways of functioning, or, in Rob Nixon's terms, they often turn into slow violence. Nixon describes this term to highlight the plight of the poor and marginalised section of society, which faces the wrath of unsustainable environmental changes in due course (46). Slow violence is a crucial term, as it emphasises the gradual deterioration of the environment resulting from the disruption of ecological balance caused by human activities. I notice one such example of slow violence and nature's metaphorical response in the novel. Sripathi observes that on one fine night, somebody had cut the Ashoka tree on the other side of the building. Cutting down trees is a simple and menacing human activity that initiates contrasting material interactions among different entities. Nature speaks for itself, and matter is an essential tool in nature's voice, which becomes a metaphorical narrative of slow violence. After the tree is cut, the narrative of the novel becomes peculiar: "The water pulsed and shivered, contained by the two immobile blocks of cement and brick within which two hundred bodies slept and dreamt, and Sripathi was almost certain that he could hear it sighing against the sands" (Rau Badami 176). Here, it is the human's act of environmental violence, cutting down a tree, which generates nature's metaphorical voice and which could also result in catastrophic events. The sighing water equally holds intra-active potential to disrupt the human civilisation, as it is full of vibrant vitality, which intra-actively modifies humans and nonhumans. Water becomes a witness to environmental degradation and expresses its disregard time and again. I observe that nonhuman agents, which involve intra-active possibilities of things, bodies, and other nonhuman entities, shape socio-political and ecological meanings (Iovino and Oppermann 456).

Environmental Activism

Towards the novel's end, the narrative shifts from subtle references to environmental degradation to aggressive campaigns. For example, Sripathi's ecological concern differs from Arun's as Arun goes one step further in acting and making substantial changes to preserve the environment. Arun says, "For me and my friends, the fight is against daily injustice, our own people stealing our rights. This is the only world I have, and I feel responsible for it. I have to

make sure that it doesn't get blown up, or washed away in the next flood, or poisoned by chemicals" (Rau Badami 239). Arun's voice recounts Nixon's idea of slow violence, which is responsible for "the burden of unsustainable ecological degradation that impacts the health and livelihood of the poor" (46). Arun's activism indicates the exorbitant pollution caused by heavy industries and raises a voice against slow violence, which affects the poor sections of society disproportionately. We can also observe that Shripati's concern for environmental issues is transformed into aggressive actions in Arun, his son. Sripathi, although he knows his son is right, worries about his future and his responsibilities to his family. The common question of settling a family and raising children hinders the path to securing a better future for the next generation. Shripati "knew deep down that his son had a point, but still, all that talk about duty, what about his duty towards his family? And tomorrow he might get married and have children, how would he support them?" (Rau Badami 239). This is also the point where the novel's title finds its space. The hero's walk is what the narrator leads the reader to. The hero fights for the greater good of society. The hero must sacrifice his family duties for national or global responsibilities. The point of the hero's walk becomes significant because the family's duties and duties for the environment are usually at odds with one another. Arun's voice justifies an act of "eco-literary public practice to a specific act of reading environmentally in order to flesh out why this way of thinking about ecocriticism might make a difference" (Sandilands 129). Sripathi does not advocate such 'environmental bravery', and he reproaches Arun, "You idiot, I, too, dreamed of being a hero and look at me now. You will lose all that crusading innocence as your hair turns grey, and you find your responsible for lives other than your own. It will all slip away, one by one, your dreams vaporised by the fierce reality. A house, a scooter, your child's education, the doctor's bills, food and clothes and shoes…" (Rau Badami 240). Sripathi's concerns raise the timeless issue of prioritising family over saving the world. But how can the family be safe when the world is in danger? This is where environmental activism is different from other civil rights activism, as it must question and reject subtle and unnoticed harmful practices under the pretext of neoliberalism (Checker 391).

Humans and nonhumans are interconnected; what happens to one will also affect the other. In response to Sripathi's question about what the sea turtle's fate has to do with humans' future, Arun replies, "We are all part of nature, Appu. If the natural world goes, so do we. All the industrial effluents being dumped into the sea are destroying the turtles, and soon they will destroy us too. Before long the water table will be affected, instead of drinking water we will be drinking chlorine or whatever poison is being unloaded" (Rau Badami 246). The point recalls Barad's concept of intra-action, which "signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies" (Barad, *Meeting the Universe* 33). As the world is intra-actively constituted, humans and nonhumans do not exist independently but emerge through their intra-active interaction. While taking the nonhuman section into consideration. Arun's activism critiques human-centric sustainability, as it overlooks the pivotal role of nonhumans. Arun's inclusive sustainability aligns with Alaimo, who also critiques human-centric sustainability endorsed by several governments to raise awareness about climate change (562). This anthropocentric sustainability is always incomplete, as the web of intra-active connections between humans and nonhumans requires the well-being of nonhumans. In order to recognise this intra-active cohesiveness, the focus of humanity should be to eliminate "both traditional and contemporary ethical projects tend to invoke the human/nonhuman divide as inviolable" (Simal-González 158). Therefore, affecting one faction of the world is going to affect the other faction of the world. Understanding and recognising the existence of nonhumans as equal partners of the planet is a possible way to achieve environmental sustainability.

Ecological balance requires cohesion between humans and nonhumans, including living and nonliving. Eva Polak observes that life sustains not in isolation but "through complex networks of interconnectivity" among all the human and nonhuman entities (116). Disruption of such networks or ecological balance actualises in abnormal environmentality, and the imminent or impending dangers lurk in the form of climate change. Rau Badami narrates one such event, which illustrates the subversiveness of nature, as the nonhuman environment assumes a subversive materiality, wreaking havoc among the people of the region. The writer shows how a heavy downpour causes destruction in the village of Toturpuram. The writer narrates, "Now the people of Toturpuram, who had so longed for rain, cursed it with every breath" (Rau Badami 316). Rau Badami shows nature's wrath: "A small village nearby was swept away; all of its inhabitants were killed except for an old woman in a mud hut. Miraculously alive, still surrounded by her chickens, a stray dog and a goat, she seemed blissfully unaware of the storm" (Rau Badami 316). It is also interesting to note that an old woman who lived in union with nature did not die. Rau Badami indicates that humans' union with nature is a key to their longevity. The more they are separated from nature and act as masters, the more likely they are to find their doomed future. Despite human activities and the disruption of a natural cycle, nature continues to heal, making humans pay the price. As the writer narrates, "The water in the Big House compound, which had subsided a bit, began to lick again at the edges of the verandah. Brown and black worms, swept out of their holes in the earth, coiled and uncoiled like burning rubber on the damp tiles, and in the evening the house rustled with flying ants blindly hitting the light bulbs" (Rau Badami 316). We can notice that water, usually an essential resource for humans, assumes subversive materiality aimed at resisting anthropocentric advances, healing wounds, and cleaning human waste. It does not take long for the water to hit the edges of the verandah again, and it does not take long for the flying ants to resist the artificial light of the night. The world is a fabric of interwoven webs that are inextricably connected with humans and nonhuman forces. In support of this claim, one of the advocates of such interconnection between humans and nonhumans, DeLoughrey, redefines the term "allegory" to identify the disjunction between humans and the natural world of nonhumans (4). For her, allegory is also known for its spatial and temporal connections, aligning local and global embeddedness. Through allegory, she weaves together our planet, species, nature, and humans under the larger umbrella of time and space (5). Drawing from this, I observe that the simultaneous and cohesive coexistence and mutual growth of humans and nonhumans are required for inclusive environmental sustainability.

Nonhuman subversiveness intensifies as nature continues its catastrophic events, and I observe that the downpour and cyclone brought the sea into the houses, with all the dirt and waste accumulated in the sea. It is right to say that polluting the sea is polluting humans. Putti, in the novel, accidentally walks into the water, and "she was polluted for all eternity. She was soiled for ever" (Rau Badami 342). Just as humans attempt to pollute nonhumans (the sea), the nonhuman (the sea) also comes directly to houses to return the pollution. Once the cyclone performs the duty of nature, the turtles return to the shore to complete the breeding cycle. The writer says that their life cycle "had started long before humans had been imagined into creation by Brahma, and had survived the voracious appetite of those same humans. In the long continuum of turtle life, humans were nearly dots" (Rau Badami 355). The sea has a transcorporeal connection with humans, for it shapes socio-cultural beliefs, reacts against menaces of pollution, and activates the eventualities of climate change. Therefore, the narrative of human waste in the sea is a common factor in the novel, wherein sea pollution and its detrimental effects on sea turtles become focal points towards the end. Because of such transcorporeal connections, it is necessary to be accountable for both the

species that live on the land and the depths of the sea and recognise the vibrancy of living and non-living matter. For example, sea turtles' contribution to the ecosystem is huge, as they have existed for thousands of years, even before humans evolved. The powerful agency, as Iovino and Oppermann opine, shapes our perceptions, but it does not end there, as the sea, if required, can also alter the bodies, as is noticeable when waste is dumped back into the houses, rendering the bodies impure for eternity. It is as if the sea translated the sea waste into human waste.

Conclusion

The novel conveys material interaction between humans and nonhumans, including non-living materials, and showcases the significance of union with all nonhuman entities. The planet's success is not about the success of humans; it is the interconnected web of collective existence that decides a harmonious and liveable future. Rau Badami shows the intricacies of human lives and nonhuman connections to suggest how environmental preservation is a global challenge. It is equally important to consider the material side of the planet and to reconsider its role in alleviating global concerns. To provide a comprehensive understanding of contemporary postcolonial conditions, the novel presents environmental concerns, material consciousness, and issues of transnational migration in parallel. It showcases the potential of the matter, relating it to transcorporeal connections to humans, and linking migrations with the nostalgia for lost nature. Such transcorporeality and material eventualities allow writers to juxtapose and correlate local problems of an individual or a society with global issues of ecological balance. The embedded web of human bodies and the universe of nonhumans, while eliminating human exceptionalism and individual distinctness, creates a broader and all-encompassing vision that endorses inclusive and cohesive environmental sustainability, one that cannot afford assurance of only human survival but also the simultaneous well-being of nonhuman living entities and the sanctity of material vibrancy. The embeddedness of humans, nonhumans, and natures compels humans to be accountable for environmental degradation, or in Nixon's words, slow violence, occurring in any region of the world, and to address the challenge of mitigating climate change and other eventualities of environmental illness.

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Bio note

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